DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 198 669 EC 131 795

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TITLE Special Pedagogics in Pre-School Education (SIF).
INSTITUTION National Swedish Board of Education, Stockholm.
PUB DATE Sep 80
NOTE 17p.
JOURNAL CIT School Research Newsletter: Sep 1980

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Disabilities: *Foreign Countries: *Instruction: *Preschool Education
IDENTIFIERS SIF Project: *Sweden

ABSTRACT

The SIF project in Sweden investigated problems of special education at the preschool level. Project activities included the analysis of diagnosis and treatment methods, participation in a preschool institution where parental education and special support were essential aims, and a study of the problem prevention functions of environmental planning. One part of the SIF project investigated the factors stimulating and inhibiting the implementation of the basic attitude to child care expressed in official reports. Among conclusions were that the staff of a preschool institution should take the children's needs as their starting point but regard the problems which arise as being connected with the situation as a whole and not only the specific child, and that the contributions of the expert in the preschool instituton should be made principally via staff and parents. The document includes lists of reports from the Department of Practical Education, other publications, and graduate and postgraduate theses. (SBH)

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Title of project	Special pedagogics in pre-school education (SIF)
Project no.	112
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The project is presented in two sections. The first of these deals with the project as a whole, while in the second Ingrid Toshach presents the sub-sector concerning the work of pre-school personnel.

THE PROJECT

Purpose

The SIF project has elucidated problems of special education at pre-school level by the following means:

- An investigation of possible measures of support in the general context of child care.
- Participation in and analysis of experimental co-ordinated activation measures.
- An investigation of the feasibility of integrated support measures within the framework of normal pre-school activities.
- Participation in and follow-up of parental education within open pre-school education as a part of preventive and supporting efforts.
- Participation in the planning of the educational environment.
- Investigation of the terms on which "special support" in pre-school education can be co-ordinated with "special pedagogics" in schools.

Activities

The project lasted between 1974/75 and 1978/79 and was financed by the NBE with grants totalling Skr 711 000. Work on processing the project material is still in progress. Several postgraduate theses have been geared to the project. Special pre-school pedagogics have been scrutinized from various angles: as functional therapy and personality support respectively, on an integral or separate organizational basis, and from an individual, social and ecological vantage point. Developments in Sweden have been compared with current child care tendencies in other countries. Surveys of international research in this field have been compiled in the course of the project.

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The activation measures which the new Child Care Act makes it the duty of municipal authorities to organize have been examined along two lines in the course of the project. Project personnel have served with a joint activation group in Mölndal, and secondly, experimental activities in a number of other municipalities have been scrutinized.

The first year of the project was mainly devoted to methods of diagnosis and treatment. Available methods of diagnosis and screening were synthesized, and experiments were undertaken regarding training methods. Problems of diagnosis and treatment gradually came to be incorporated in a more comprehensive perspective. One member of the project team spent two school years observing activities at a pre-school institution in Mölndal with the aim of elucidating resources of personnel, methods and organization for the solution of problems of special education and integrated measures within the framework of regular pre-school education. The planning by personnel of their work was studied by observer participants.

In Kungsbacka the project team participated for two years in a newly opened pre-school institution where parental education and "special support" were essential aims. Study circles and information activities for parents were arranged in connection with the open pre-school establishment, which parents visited together with their children without any formal registration. The Social Welfare Administration and its child supervision section referred parents and children in need of special support to this open pre-school establishment. Activities were continuously observed by a member of the project team who conducted observations and interviewed parents and staff.

One member of the project team participated in the planning of new pre-school institutions in Mölndal and Kungsbacka. One of the main tasks of the project has been to study the problem prevention functions of environmental planning.

A comparative scrutiny of "special support" at pre-school level and "special pedagogics" in schools has been undertaken in the

course of the project on the basis of a documentation analysis. The scrutiny covered aims, theoretical focus, organization and forms of activity.

Experience

Special pre-school pedagogics corresponding to the basic approach in child care displays the following characteristics.

- No hand and fast boundary is drawn between children in need of special support and other children.
- Special measures are undertaken according to a comprehensive approach and are not confined to isolated functional therapy.
- Problems are not only regarded as individual; disruptions of social relations are also taken into consideration.
- Efforts to solve problems are made primarily within the child's natural surroundings.
- The physical environment is also taken into consideration in preventive work.
- Child care support measures need to be followed up during the school ages.

Activation experiments have indicated that the following factors are particularly important: measures applied early and followed up continuously, comprehensive and flexible selective criteria, partnership (at various levels) between pedagogics, social welfare, paediatrics and parental information.

The main prerequisites of integrated support measures in pre-school education are personnel education (with particular emphasis on concretizing the total approach to child care and factors impeding and encouraging the practical implementation of this approach in schools), team work, the co-ordination of personnel resources (e.g. expert participation in regular pre-school activities), and a properly structured working procedure.

The experimental scheme of parental education in the open pre-school establishment was given a very positive reception by the parents themselves, by staff and by the social welfare authorities. The open pre-school has provided a form of natural "special support" and an opportunity for information and for discussions of child problems with other parents.

In the matter of environmental planning, the project has evolved two institutional models which can stimulate preventive work. One of this refers to an "integrated institution" in which pre-school, school, child health care and social services are housed close together, pooling certain facilities and functions. The other model is that of "neighbourhood pre-school institutions", small units in close contact with homes. These facilities are also planned with a view to joint use. A group of neighbourhood pre-school institutions of this kind, planned in collaboration with residents, is being built at Kungsbacka.

The comparative analysis of "special support" at pre-school level and "special pedagogics" in schools has indicated various factors which, despite fairly considerable agreement between the two types of educational institution in the matter of overriding aims, appear to impede effective co-ordination. There are, for example, differences of tradition, basic educational approach, premises regarding the psychology of learning and developmental psychology, and teacher training. Conflicts between declared intentions and limited frame conditions within the two types of educational institution also have the effect of obstructing desirable co-operation.

Dissemination of findings

The project has to a great extent assumed the character of action research, and findings have been disseminated partly as a result of those responsible for experimentation (concerning parental education in open pre-school institutions and concerning environmental planning) receiving visiting groups and presenting their activities at conferences and training courses. The project personnel

have taken part in the training of pre-school teachers, class teachers and special teachers and in an educational fair in Gothenburg. The project has been included in a Nordic joint group started by the Nordic Cultural Secretariat, and it has been represented in a long-term child care programme under the auspices of OECD-CERI, "Early Childhood". Information concerning the project has been distributed via articles in newspapers and periodicals, interim memoranda, reports and doctoral theses, including those listed below.

Reports from the Department of Practical Education

Lassbo, G" Swedish research into pedagogics for pre-school children with special requirements. Essay no. 43, 1946. (In Swedish)

Svensson, G: Parental education in open pre-school institutions - a special form of support in child care. Essay no. 59, 1979. (In Swedish)

Wickström, U: Activation measures among children requiring special support. Experiments and practical conclusions. Essay no. 59, 1979. (In Swedish)

Brusling, C: The relationship between pre-school and elementary school, with particular reference to "children in need of special support". An examination and comprison of official documents. Essay no. 63, 1980. (In Swedish)

Other publications

Stukát, K-G: Current trends in European pre-school research, with particular regard to compensatory education. NFER Publishing Company, Windsor, 1976

Stukát, K-G: New paths of research in special pedagogics. (Published in K. Tunnainen (Ed.), Report from a Nordic research course, "Research into special pedagogics - aims and methods", Joensuu, 1978.) (In Swedish)

Stukát, K-G: Pre-school children requiring special support for their development. (Published in K-A Sverud & O. Ernestam (Eds.), Pre-school education in perspective, Stockholm, 1978.) (In Swedish)

Toshach, I: The work of pre-school staff and "children with special requirements". NBE: Newsletter, School Research, 1980.

Graduate and postgraduate theses

Ahlin, E, & Johansson, M: Assay of Frostig´s "Mow, Grow, Learn" training programme and of the "Frostig Movement Skills Test Battery for motor diagnosis",1975. (In Swedish)

Arnold-Larsson, M, & Weirén, L: Test application of the Frostig material to mentally retarded children, 1975. (In Swedish)

Eklöf, A, & Larsson, I: Section 6 of the Child Care Act and some of its implications for basic and subsequent teacher training, 1979. (In Swedish)

Engvall, B, & Nilsson, K: Compensatory pre-school programmes - a survey and appraisal, 1974. (In Swedish)

Eriksson, U-C: Integration of four mentally retarded children in a sibling group, 1977. (In Swedish)

Hamberger, B, & Brodén, L: Children at risk - school difficulties, 1978. (In Swedish)

Hansson, U, & Häger, M: Test application of the Frostig diagnostic and training material to physically handicapped pre-school children and schoolchildren, 1975. (In Swedish)

Hellström, G, & Lundqvist, C: Evaluation of the four-year check in the County of Älvsborg, 1976. (In Swedish)

Kjellberg, B: Activation experiments with pre-school children in the Municipality of Alingsås, spring 1974, 1974. (In Swedish)

Lundell, M: The incidence of infantile autism among children and young persons aged 0-21 years in the County of Älvsborg, 1975. (In Swedish)

Lührs, M, & Larsson, J: Activation experiments among Finnish immigrant families in Gårdsten, 1976. (In Swedish)

Olofsson, E, & Tärneberg, M: Mentally retarded children in ordinary pre-school groups, 1974. (In Swedish)

Ingrid Toshach

THE WORK OF PRE-SCHOOL STAFF AND "CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS"

Background

Pre-school activities present the municipality with an opportunity of performing its exploratory and remedial obligations. Next to the family, the pre-school environment is becoming the environment in which more and more children spend the greater part of their time.

During the SIF project we have spent a great deal of time discussing and interpreting the basic attitude to child care expressed in recent official reports, together with the practical consequences which this attitude may conceivably imply.

Purpose

The main purpose of this part of the SIF project was

to investigate the extent to which these conceivable consequences of the basic attitude fit in with a pre-school institution today,

to attempt to locate and describe factors stimulating and inhibiting the implementation of this basic attitude in pre-school education.

Participation by members of the SIF project team

Pre-school work involves a host of different components, and the study had to be confined to a few of them. The staff constitute a highly important component in the child's pre-school environment.

Work with the children is obviously very important. But in recent official investigations of child care, a great deal of attention has also been devoted to work within the staff group and to the work done by staff together with parents, child health care services, schools etc. A chapter of the report of the Commission on Child Care Facilities is devoted to human interaction in the pre-school context. Co-operation occupies a very prominent position in succeeding reports, which have been given the common heading, "Co-operation in child care".

This part of the SIF project was made to concentrate on the activities of staff in discussing and planning their work.

In order to find out about their "work on their work", the staff at a pre-school institution were asked whether a member of the project team could attend their planning meetings and conferences. The institution in question had three sibling groups, an infants group, a leisure centre department, two departments run by the Mental Welfare Board and, close by, a nursery school.

I made it clear to the staff that I intended to participate actively in the discussions. The inconvenience liable to be caused by having an extra person in the group might be offset by this extra participant, as an outsider, viewing the work of the staff from a different angle. Active participation implied an opportunity of testing assumptions and asking questions. I intended to try to function as a responsive interlocutor.

An important foundation for this working method, in my opinion, was the acceptance and acknowledgement of the knowledge and experience possessed by the staff and of their reflections concerning the same. I therefore refrained altogether from observing or taking part in the work in the children´s group.

The reaction of the staff to my inquiry was on the whole positive. One team felt that the presence of an additional person at planning meetings would be too much of a burden, owing to a high personnel turnover rate.

I attended staff planning meetings, conferences and other get-togethers very frequently for one year and to some extent for a further year.

I recorded the planning meetings on tape. Otherwise I made notes.

Experience

The points given below (in italics) are those which ought to characterize a school operating in accordance with the basic attitude manifested by official reports. Each of these points is followed by some of my observations concerning the way on which a pre-school institution really works.

1. *The staff of this notional pre-school institution take the children's needs as their starting point but regard the problems which arise as being connected with the situation as a whole and not only to the child.*

Planning content centred mainly round the children. The focus of interest was on the individual child. Less attention was paid to the group as a whole.

When talking about individual children, the staff would often depict a child's behaviour in a situation involving interaction with other children. Quite often they referred to the importance of other children, parents and themselves to the individual child. Moreover, the staff often noted changes occurring with the passage of time. This is what one member of the staff had to say about the influence of an unusual situation on the relationship between herself and one of the children.

> I had a really tough time with Göran last spring term. It was awful. At one point I could hardly stand the sight of him ... But then we both turned up together at the day nursery when it was open during the holidays; he was there and I was working there. It made an enormous difference. He was in completely different sur-

roundings, with completely different people. It was such a relief, like being given a fresh start. It helped me tremendously, and I suppose it helped him as well.

2. *The second point which should characterize a pre-school institution operating in accordance with the basic attitude is that its staff regard problems or needs for special support as being related, not only to the situation here and now but also to factors outside that situation. In other words, difficulties are taken to hinge partly on the attitudes, values and ideology of the surroundings.*

On several occasions the pre-school staff reacted to differences between their views concerning the nature of problems affecting children and the views held on the subject by certain parents, nurses and elementary school teachers, for example. Among other things they noted that, in their opinion, some of the so-called problems concerning children they were working with were not really problems about children. But they believed that, since school activities were different from pre-school activities, these things would become problems in school.

3. *Pre-school staff endeavour to give each child the special support which he or she needs. Classifications of children are temporary and ad hoc. The child and its situation are constantly changing, and so too are the knowledge, attitudes and actions of the staff.*

The expression "children with special needs" was very seldom used by the staff during their planning meetings. Nor did any similar concepts occur. The staff simply talked about Göran, Eva, Bosse and so on. They often remarked on changes undergone by the individual child.

I would like to run the last part of point three, concerning changes in the knowledge, attitudes and actions of staff, into point four, which is as follows.

4. *Efforts are made to acquire a good knowledge, not only of the individual child and of child development generally, but also of the material and other conditions in which children develop. The knowledge arising out of a natural and permanent relationship with the child, if not sufficient, is so often necessary in order to be able to solve or otherwise cope with the problems which arise or are discovered.*

The staff supplied each other with a considerable amount of factual information about planning, and they also described events in the children´s group and in connection with parental contacts. They evaluated their experiences and they talked about problems.

On the other hand, the goals of work were broached relatively seldom. Nor was there any discussion of the frames of activities. Suggestions concerning expedients or actions and decisions concerning measures to be taken often occurred, for example, with reference to a work schedule or to activities such as excursions and baking. A measure to be taken would occasionally be suggested in connection with a problem: "Perhaps we ought .." It was very seldom decided to pursue a certain course of action.

There was no systematic evaluation.

In this connection is perhaps also interesting to note that the staff very seldom asked each other questions concerning anything but questions of fact. In this respect the SIF representative - myself - differed to some extent from the other members of the group. In my opinion this observation merits a certain amount of attention, on condition that questions help to clarify problems, goals, impediments, opportunities etc.

5. *The staff regard co-operation, primarily with parents but also with experts and other persons active in the child care sector, as a necessary part of the process of utilizing all available resources. This co-operation is based on the view that the best opportunities of*

solving the majority of problems are to be found in the child's natural surroundings.

Co-operation within the institution was discussed on several occasions at staff conferences, particular emphasis being placed on the need for co-operation with the Mental Welfare departments. The isolated location of those departments was considered to impede such co-operation. While I was monitoring work at this pre-school institution, the staff not only held internal conferences but also had meetings, for example, together with parents, staff from other day nurseries, mental welfare services for children and young persons, schools and administrative authorities.

As an example of this type of co-operation, the district assistant spent a month attending the weekly conferences in response to desires expressed by the staff for closer co-operation.

6. *The contributions of the expert in the notional pre-school institution are made principally via staff and parents. This need not preclude direct contact between the expert and individual children or groups of children, but contacts of this kind also occur as far as possible in the children's natural surroundings.*

As an example of this working method, a working team both charted a perceptive disturbance and administered training to the girl whom the mental health services for children and young persons had found to be suffering from such a disturbance. The mental health services lacked sufficient resources at the time for conducting perception training, nor did they have qualified staff to supervise such training. They were in favour of the work being done, and they supplied the material.

Work using the Frostig material was mentioned by one member of staff in the following terms.

To save Eva from having to practise this on her own and feeling conspicuous, we got her to work together with Ulla. But we couldn't get an extra book for Ulla, so we had to run off loose leaf copies. Now Ulla has any number of loose pages.

We may note in passing that several staff members, from other teams as well as the one mentioned above, attended a course in the use of Frostig's perception and training material.

7. *The pre-school staff of the notional pre-school institution feel that co-operation with schools demands special attention. Efforts are made to ensure that schools continue building on the work laid down at the pre-school stage.*

During the period in which I monitored activities, co-operation with schools came to be established on a relatively firm footing. Conferences were held between staff from both institutions, there was a permanent joint committee and, perhaps most important of all, there was a certain amount of co-operation on the everyday plane.

The term "children with special requirements" was used on several occasions in the course of these contacts with school staff and also in contacts with nurses at child care centres, day nursery assistants etc. For example, the pre-school staff were asked by the school representatives to state the number of children in need of special support and the nature of the problems affecting these children. These data were needed in order to plan the scope and distribution of special educational resources.

Summary

Summing up, work at pre-school level as manifested in planning sessions and at conferences can be said on the whole to tally with the notional concretization of the basic attitude. There is one exception, namely the working methods employed by the staff at planning sessions and conferences. This cannot be said to resemble

the working method outlined in the characterization. Thus there was no consistent use of a working procedure whereby both potentialities and limitations concerning activities were broached on the basis of an analysis of problems and where the action emanating from the analysis of problems was evaluated in order to shed light on the particular problem involved and also for the enhancement of general knowledge.

It is hard to gauge the importance of these various phases of work for the work devoted to children. Official inquiries, for example, have devoted relatively little attention to this aspect of the work done by pre-school staff, compared with the interest taken in work in the children´s group and co-operation with parents, child health care centres, schools and others. The intended working approach outlined here can be briefly termed problem-oriented. It can be considered as related to a scientific approach and of importance in cognitive production. One possible conclusion to be drawn from my experience of the way in which pre-school staff work during their planning meetings is that there is every reason to focus attention, not only on the content of the training undergone by pre-school staff but also, as has been done in recent years, on working procedures as a future instrument in the everyday work of pre-school education.

I have already remarked that pre-school work as manifested by planning sessions and conferences tallied on the whole with the notional concretization of the basic attitude. But this work cannot automatically be viewed as the expression of a conscious opinion on the part of the staff. If it were, one could argue that the staff had a comprehensive view concerning children, needs and special support. In her report, "Children in special need of support and stimulus" (1979), Anita Wiechel, describing interviews of pre-school staff and others, observes that the staff interviewed do not express a comprehensive view. In my opinion this shows the importance of clearly distinguishing between the views consciously expressed by the staff and the lines which emerge in discussions of work and the planning of work. It is also important to distinguish these two dimensions from events in the children´s group which we need to know more about.

Finally I would like to draw attention to a third circumstance which transpired in the work of the staff and which touches on the outline description of a pre-school institution operating in keeping with a certain basic attitude.

The main points with which this description is concerned are comprehensive view and co-operation. These have been the salient ideas expressed by official reports on child care amenities in recent years.

The pre-school staff in "my" pre-school institution co-operated with the child care centre, schools and administrative authorities etc. "Children with special requirements" and other such concepts were employed in the course of this co-operation. Thus in these cases co-operation as a guideline can in practice be said to some extent to conflict with a comprehensive view of children, needs and special support.

Reference

Wiechel, A: Children in special need of support and stimulus. Pedagogiska-psykologiska problem, Malmö School of Education, no. 360, 1979. (In Swedish)